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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 RPO DUBAI 000315

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: IRANIAN JEWISH YOUTH "CONFESSES" TO SPYING FOR ISRAEL;  
JEWISH EMIGRATION ON THE RISE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy Richardson, Acting Director, Iran  
Regional Presence Office, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: A former Jewish MP said that at least one Jewish youth was among the hundred defendants subjected to the first show trial that began August 1 and the 18-year old has already made a videotaped confession to spying on behalf of Israel. His arrest has sparked fears that more members of Iran's dwindling Jewish community could be dragged into the election dispute. The community was already living in a climate of fear instilled by Ahmadinejad's anti-Israel rhetoric and the threat of a military strike by Israel, which would leave the Iranian Jewish community extremely vulnerable to reprisals. Emigration rates have risen during the past two years because of the political tensions and he estimated the community has dwindled to 20,000 people, a significant drop from the widely-accepted estimate of 25,000. The former MP, who maintains many contacts with well-known political figures, believes Mousavi won about 60 percent of the vote and that participation rates were exaggerated. His increasing concern that his community will be scapegoated as a result of the political infighting between conservatives and reformers is especially meaningful since many of the key figures he credits with providing "cover" for the Jewish community against radicals - including Khatami, Karrubi, and even Rafsanjani - are now themselves in a desperate struggle for their own political survival. End summary.

Jewish Youth "Confesses" to Spying for Israel

12. (S/NF) Morris Motamed, a former two-term MP for Iran's Jewish community, told IRPO that four Jewish youths were arrested by Basij militiamen while participating in the June 20 street demonstrations in Tehran. The four teenagers spent one night herded into a parking lot with dozens of other detained demonstrators. According to their families, the whole group was badly beaten with batons and stun guns throughout the night before being moved to a police station, where the physical abuse continued. Two of the young men were released after "two or three days" but the other two were transferred to Evin Prison and held 18 days. According to Motamed, who said he maintains ties with many former and current IRIG officials from his days as an MP, the two young men were released after he spoke with Hossein Ali Amiri, who is the deputy to Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Shahroudi. The two were re-arrested in their homes on

July 18 by "IRGC security. " One of the boy's mothers told Motamed that in a phone call from her son, he said that a judge had told them the young men must prove that they were not at the demonstration that accompanied Rafsanjani's Friday prayer sermon on July 17. Motamed believes the families, who maintain their sons did not participate in additional demonstrations after their initial release from prison and have no links to Israel beyond their religion.

13. (S/NF) Motamed said that at least one of the young men picked up July 18, Yeghoutiel Shaoolian, was among the detainees prosecuted in the August 1 show trial. He said that Shaoolian's mother told him that at some point during his incarceration her son made a taped statement in which he confessed to spying for Israel. Motamed believes that Shaoolian's confession may be linked to the testimony of the "unnamed spy" referenced in the six-part indictment released by the government in advance of the trial. Motamed, who was an MP during the trial of the 13 Jewish Iranians arrested in 1999 in Shiraz and Esfahan on espionage charges, fears a repeat of that ordeal, which he says had far-reaching repercussions for Iran's Jewish community. (Note: Motamed said he became acquainted with Amiri, who is now Shahroudi's deputy, because Amiri was head of the judiciary in Shiraz in 1999 and played a key role in reducing sentences against the Jewish men, three of whom were originally sentenced to be hanged.)

#### Commenting on the Election

14. (S/NF) Motamed, while precluded from insider status due to his religion, nevertheless maintains a wide range of contacts developed during his service as an MP during the sixth and seventh Majles. He estimated participation in the election by

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Jewish Iranians to be only about 20 percent, which he characterized as typical. A Mousavi supporter, he maintained that his candidate likely took about 60 percent of the vote. He believes Karrubi did respectably as well and may have come in second ahead of Ahmadinejad. He said his wife volunteered for Karrubi's campaign and that the size of the candidate's volunteer staff alone was not much less than the number votes he received according to official figures. Motamed noted that the participation figure of 85 percent was likely inflated as well. He thought participation rates of 70 or even 75 percent, much like during Khatami's era, were much more plausible. Speculating on the potential ramifications of the elite infighting and the widespread popular discontent, he predicted that the government's days were numbered, but that political repression will worsen before the regime falls. "Khamenei knows he's in danger, " he asserted. Motamed also argued that most of the Grand Ayatollahs - "the only clerics who matter anymore" - support Rafsanjani, and Khamenei now depends almost exclusively on the muscle of the Revolutionary Guards to maintain power.

15. (S/NF) Motamed said that during his terms in Parliament, he became the de facto interlocutor of the Jewish community for Iranian political figures, including Khatami and Karrubi, who still pay him courtesy calls to mark major Jewish holidays. He last spoke to Khatami in April when the former president invited him to go on a trip to the United States in September. Motamed assumes the trip is now off but plans to ask Khatami personally in the near future.

#### Jewish Emigration on the Rise

¶16. (S/NF) Motamed said that the consensus of the community is that only about 20,000 Jews now remain in Iran and noted that emigration has increased over the past two years following President Ahmadinejad's increasingly strident rhetoric against Israel and his public questioning of the Holocaust. Though Jewish Iranians "continue to love Iran" they are being compelled to leave, mostly out of fear that they will become targets of a government backlash should Israel confront Iran militarily. Motamed said he lives in fear of an Israeli strike because the Jewish community has no ability to protect itself from what he believes would be a wide-scale attack on Jews and Jewish interests. He said that while economic opportunity and the chance to live somewhere as a "first-class citizen" do factor into decisions to leave, the uptick in departures is driven mostly by fear of the future. Motamed noted that as a community leader, he has been asked for many years his opinion by Jews weighing their options. Until two years ago, he told people they had to make the decision themselves. Now, he said, he recommends moving out of Iran to every Jew who asks his opinion. He estimated that 80 percent of Jews emigrate to the United States, while the rest relocate to Israel or Europe. (Note: Motamed's wife is emigrating to the U.S. and he is considering his options.)

¶17. (S/NF) Of the Jews left in Iran, Motamed said 11,000 to 12,000 live in Tehran, 6,000 in Shiraz, and about 1,500 in Esfahan, with the balance scattered over ten other smaller cities. He noted that only eight rabbis remain in Iran, three of whom are based in Tehran, three in Shiraz, and two in Esfahan. He said that training new rabbis is increasingly a problem as the rabbinical population dwindles. Recently the "informal yeshiva" in Yazd closed and now there is only a small program run by the rabbis in Shiraz. Motamed reported that the community's efforts to import rabbis have met only modest success, in the form of a London-based rabbi who recently visited Iran for a short period. The IRIG rejected a proposal to have a rabbi from New York City make regular visits to Iran.

Comment

¶18. (S/NF) Motamed is a well-established IRPO contact who plays a unique role as a bridge between Iran's vulnerable Jewish

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minority and the Shia Muslim political establishment. His increasing concern that his community will be scapegoated as a result of the political infighting between conservatives and reformers is especially meaningful since many of the key figures he credits with providing "cover" for the Jewish community against radicals - including Khatami, Karrubi, and even Rafsanjani - are now themselves in a desperate struggle for their own political survival.

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